

Résumé of presentation:

Multilingualism versus Language Policy: Alternative Models for the EC

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1. A specter is haunting Europe—the specter of multilingualism. Many have concluded that actions to overcome language barriers in the EC are “indispensable” or that additional official EC languages are “impossible”. But such conclusions are premature. The EC has complex alternatives in language policy, including linguistically-related measures in education, terminology, standardization, migration, and advertising, for example. In choosing policies on official languages, the EC chooses not only the number and identities of its official languages but also the language regime in which the official languages are used. Some language regimes make multiple official languages much more feasible than do others.

2. To illustrate the many models that can be applied in the design of a regime of official languages, consider figure 1, an imaginary table around which representatives of several language groups of different sizes gather to conduct a deliberation:

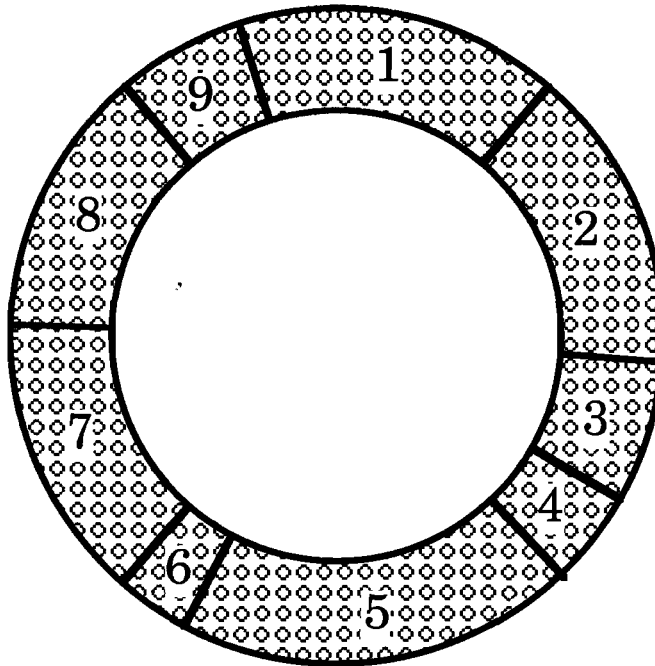
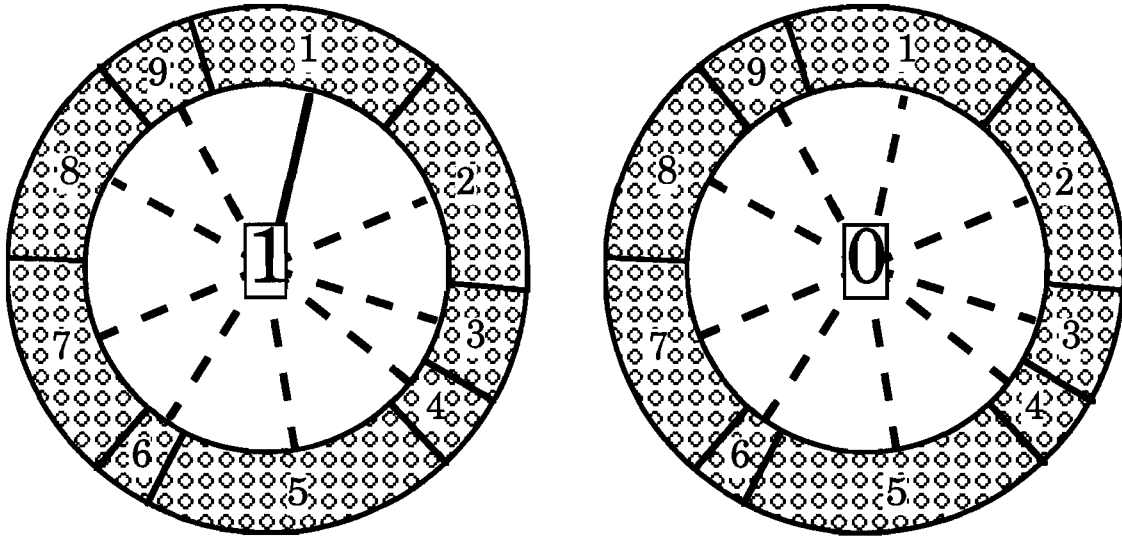


Figure 1

How shall we make it possible for these persons to make statements that all other persons at the table can understand? There are many possibilities, but let's consider six of them.

3. The “monarchic model” makes one of the groups' languages official and requires everyone who doesn't have it as a native language to learn it. Then all those at the table use only it, and

everyone understands everything that is said, without translation.

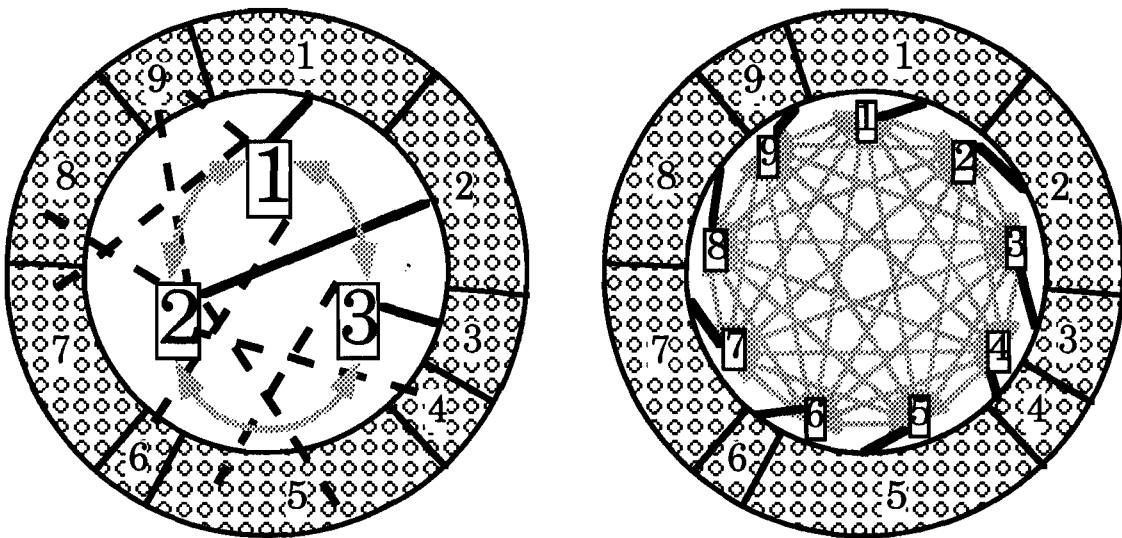


Monarchic Model

Synarchic Model

Figure 2

4. The “synarchic model” operates like the monarchic model, except that a synthetic language designed to be learned by the native speakers of these groups is made the sole official language.



Oligarchic Model

Panarchic Model

Figure 3

5. The “oligarchic model” makes more than one but fewer than all of the groups' languages official and requires each person to use any official language, at the person's discretion. Thus, different persons in some group might learn and use different official languages, but everyone in a group whose native language is official would use it and therefore not need to learn any other language. Centrally provided translators translate every statement directly into each of the official languages other than the one in which the statement is made.

6. The “panarchic model” makes all the groups' languages official. Therefore, no person at the table needs to learn any nonnative language. Direct translation is provided as in the oligarchic model.

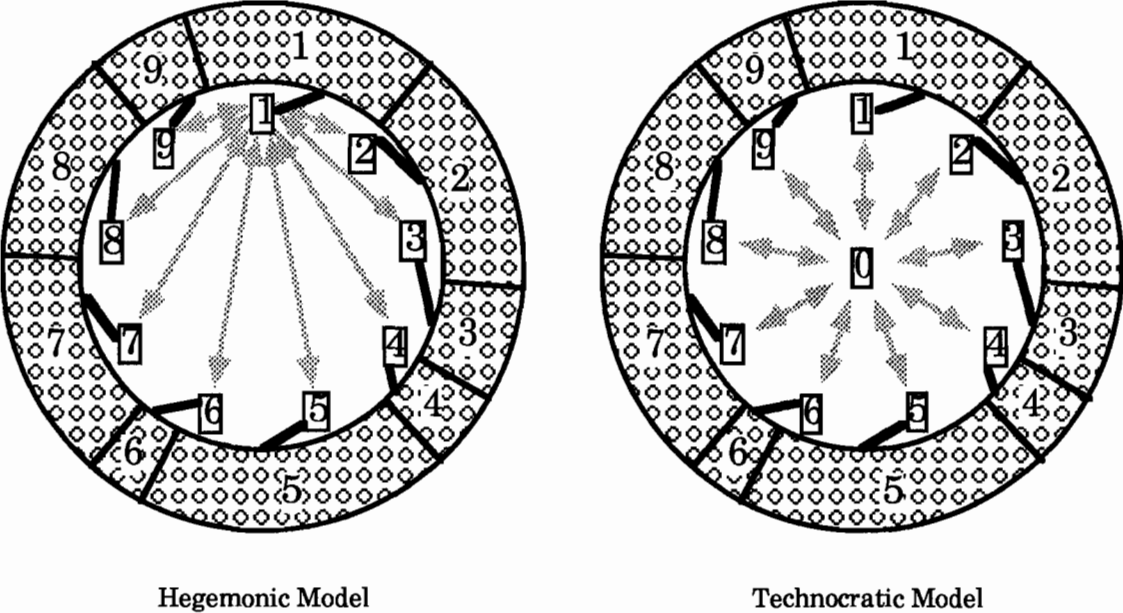


Figure 4

7. The “hegemonic model” makes all the groups' languages official, like the panarchic model, but requires all translation to be conducted through one of those languages. Any statement made in that language is translated directly into all the others. Any other statement is translated into that language and then is again translated from that language into all the other languages except the one in which it was made.

8. The “technocratic model” operates like the hegemonic model, except that the intermediate language for translation is a synthetic language designed to be used by translators working from and into the languages of the participating groups. Therefore, every statement is translated through this language into all the groups' languages other than its original language.

9. Of these six models, which is the best? It all depends. Each of the models can be the best, depending on the criteria one uses in evaluating them. Figure 5 shows that commonly valued criteria are in disagreement as to the models they imply are best. The monarchic and synarchic models are the only ones that permit communication without translation. The panarchic, hegemonic, and technocratic models are the only ones that spare the participants the need to learn any nonnative language. The synarchic, panarchic, and technocratic models are the only ones that treat all the groups' languages equally. If translation is accepted as a feature of the selected model, then the oligarchic and panarchic models are the only ones that guarantee to each person at the table an intelligible version of each statement with no more delay than the time it takes to translate once. The oligarchic or the technocratic model makes it possible to minimize the size of the translation staff, depending on conditions. In the case of translators who know only two languages each, the oligarchic model minimizes staff size if the number of official languages is three or fewer; otherwise the technocratic model minimizes staff size. This last conclusion is based on the assumption that each translator between natural languages translates in one direction only (into the translator's native language), while each translator between a natural and a synthetic language translates in both directions.

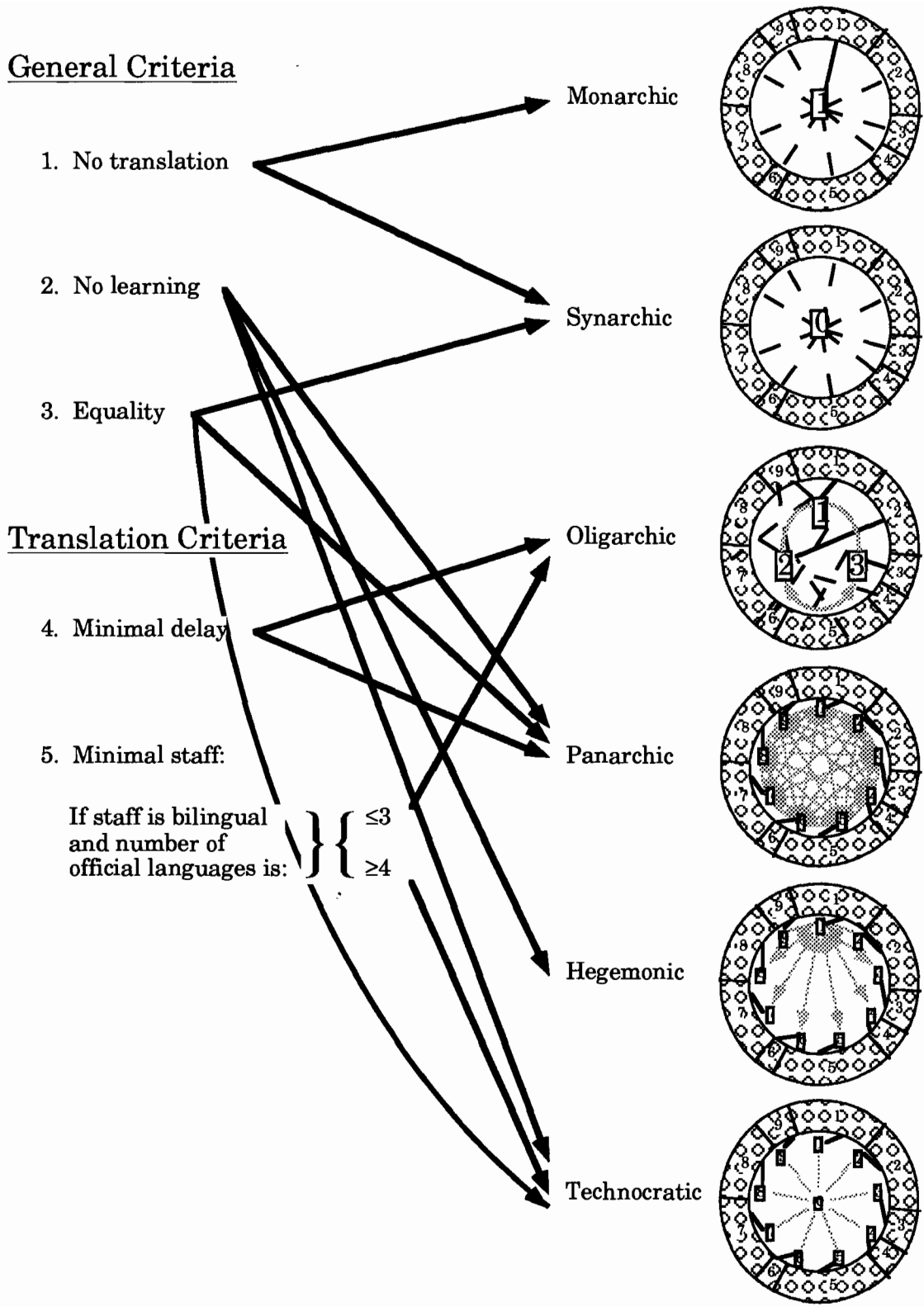


Figure 5

10. Finally, which model is best if our criterion is economy? Again, it all depends. Each model can provide the least expensive solution, under some conditions. Figure 6 shows that some likely differences in conditions cause different conclusions to emerge about the least expensive model.

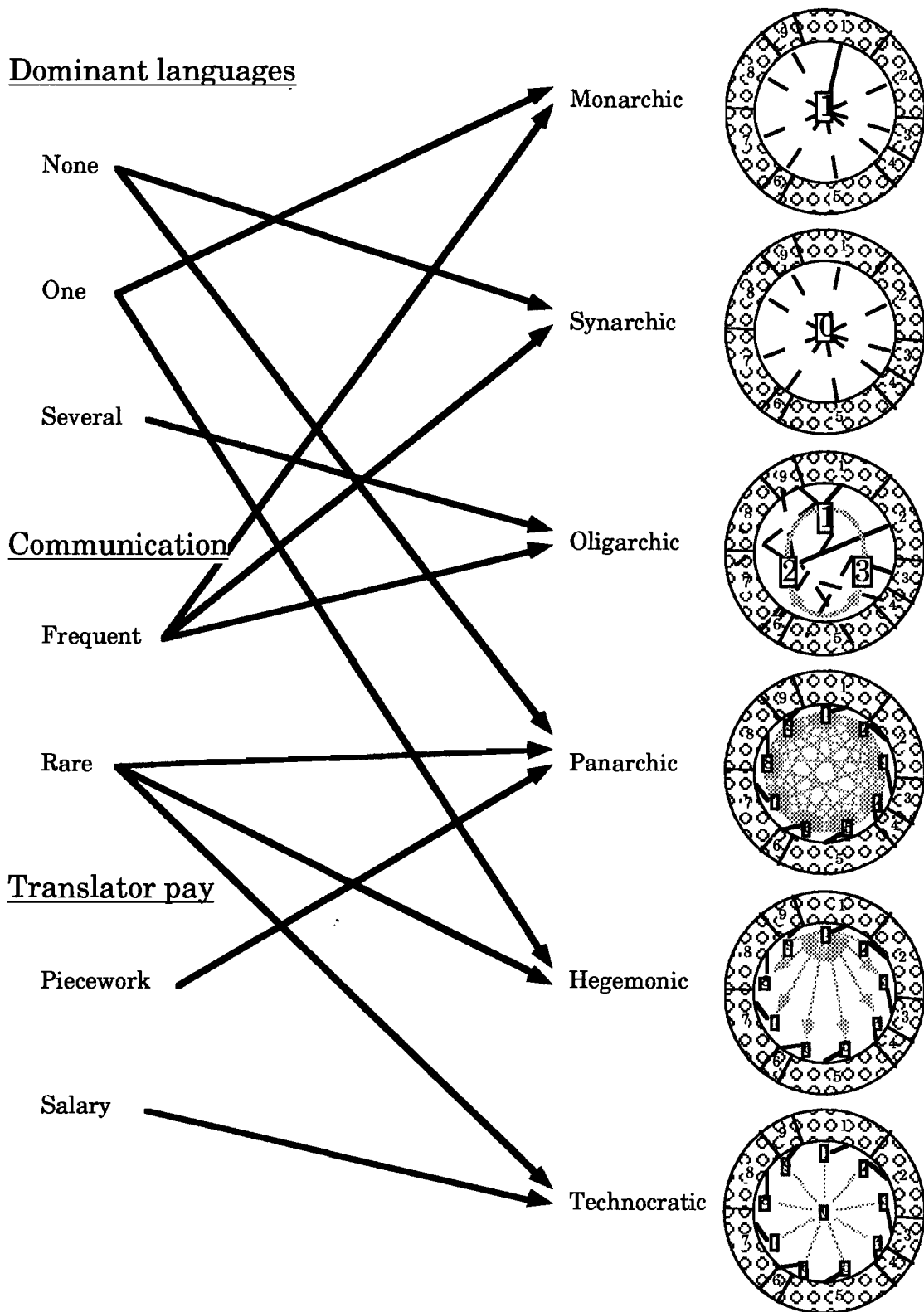


Figure 6

The monarchic model can be the least expensive when one language is numerically dominant and communication at the table is frequent, because it can then be economical to invest in language learning and to have the most widely known language be the one learned. The synarchic model

can be the least expensive when no language is numerically dominant and communication is frequent, because the economy of learning a synthetic language can then outweigh the greater number of learners in comparison with the monarchic model. The oligarchic model can be the least expensive when there are several numerically dominant languages and communication is frequent, because then the amount of learning that is required can be reduced enough to outweigh the moderate amount of translation that will be required. The panarchic model can be the least expensive when communication is rare and translators are paid by the word, because translation is then infrequent enough to be a better investment than language learning and the many translators who are not needed at any particular time (e.g., translators from language 2 to language 5 when the statement being made is in language 7) aren't being paid for idle time. The hegemonic model can be the least expensive when there is one numerically dominant language and communication at the table is rare, because language learning may not be worth its cost and most statements can be expected to be made in the selected language and therefore to be translated only once. The technocratic model can be the least expensive when communication is rare and translators must be paid a salary whether they are being used or not, because it keeps all translators used a large proportion of the time and avoids the need for an investment in language learning.

11. In conclusion, these six models, which are only a fraction of those that deserve consideration by policymakers, suffice to show that the choice of a regime of official languages can make a crucial difference in the satisfaction of commonly valued criteria, and the impact of the regime interacts with the impact of choosing the official languages themselves. A thoughtful policy on official languages will be based on the analysis of various sets of official languages operating within regimes based on various models. Facile conclusions about the optimality or impossibility of particular policies on official languages are not warranted.